

Washington, DC— Today Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) sent a letter, co-signed with Congressman Rob Andrews (D-NJ), to FAA Administrator Marion Blakey requesting an official explanation by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to clarify how much the implementation of the Integrated Airspace preferred alternative will actually reduce flight delays. The FAA has frequently cited three to six minutes per flight for the Philadelphia International Airport and other major metropolitan airports in the region, while data from the FAA website indicates that savings will only be one-sixth – or 30 seconds. — {“We must hold the FAA accountable for the information it gives to the public and Congress. The FAA continues to grossly overstate the operational efficiencies gained by the NY/NJ/PHL Airspace Redesign. Publicly available data projections indicate that the FAA Airspace Redesign will produce inconsequential benefits at a horrendous cost to Delaware County, Southern New Jersey, and other affected communities,” said Congressman Sestak.

Representatives Sestak and Andrews wrote to the FAA to express their continued concern regarding the FAA’s decision to choose the Integrated Airspace preferred alternative as the first choice for rerouting air traffic in the Northeast Corridor. They seek to have the FAA provide accurate and clear data, particularly as the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducts an investigation of the cost, efficiency, and process of the FAA Airspace Redesign project that Congress requested at the insistence of Congressmen Sestak and Andrews. Data provided from the FAA indicates that the projected reduction of delay per flight at PHL is only 30 seconds; however, the FAA has consistently suggested this plan reduces delays by three to six minutes – even though the FAA’s own website data suggests that the number is only 30 seconds savings in delays.

While Congressman Sestak understands the need to address the issue of flight delays, he strongly believes that an accurate assessment of delay reduction is critical to producing a correct cost benefit analysis for the FAA airspace redesign project. As previously mentioned, the GAO is in the process of conducting an investigation on the costs, operational efficiencies, and environmental impacts the FAA's proposed redesign of the airspace covering the New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia region due to community concerns that noise mitigation, air emissions, and other environmental impacts may not have been adequately addressed.

In December 2006, Congressman Sestak organized an Expert Advisory Board, composed of local, regional, and national experts on aviation planning, acoustics/noise, and air emission, which was charged with studying the FAA Airspace Redesign. The board determined that the FAA has to fully account for the true cost of social impacts, such as noise on educational development, air emissions on health, as well as the adverse effects on ground safety and our property values, which will cause irreparable harm to affected communities.

Congressman Sestak has been working with Congressman Rob Andrews to identify legislative solutions to address the FAA Airspace Redesign, and has met with key players on the FAA Airspace Redesign project, including FAA Administrator Marion Blakey, the former Deputy Secretary of Transportation Maria Cino, FAA Airspace Manager Steve Kelley, and key Congressional leaders, including Transportation Committee Chairman James Oberstar and Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Jerry Costello, and held several meetings open to the public to listen to community concerns.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of “Deep Blue,” the Navy’s anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the “Global War on Terrorism.” He served as President Clinton’s Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.